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ABSTRACT

The Kansas State Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services contracted with the Kansas State University Social Work and Special Education programs to develop a series of training modules for child welfare workers that would emphasize training needs of workers in rural parts of the state. This article describes the needs assessment process, which included workers themselves as a primary source of knowledge about their needs, and addresses the training plan. Subjects were approximately 75 supervisors and 495 social workers in Kansas who met in focus groups to determine training priorities and delivery issues. Data indicated a strong preference for interactive training that stressed variety. The videotape and workbook of the state's basic training format was considered a helpful way to deliver information. High priority needs were identified, and units of study were defined. Project directors chose a multimedia training with videodisc, computer, and paper-based materials. Content area specialists are involved in learning about the media and how to use them effectively. The use of interactive videodisc-based instruction holds promise for delivering effective training. One table summarizes group responses. (Contains 4 references.) (SLD)

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Title:

Design and Development of Hypermediated, Videodisc Inservice Training for Rural Social Workers

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THE NEED

Professionals who live in rural areas often have difficulty finding opportunities to receive further professional development without spending substantial amounts of time traveling to training sites. In an attempt to improve services to rural populations, distance education has become an increasingly popular form of continued training to adult audiences. The growing emphasis on distance education recognizes the needs of rural professionals who may not have the time or resources to travel to more central training sites.

As has been the case with others, the increasing workplace demands on social workers requires a feasible solution to providing in-service training for those who reside in rural areas. The workplace demands place social workers in the position of needing to know more information, yet having increased responsibilities that make it more difficult to leave the office. While distance learning opportunities have multiplied greatly in the past several years, the lack of relevant course work and access to the technology necessary to participate in these opportunities may prohibit the wide use of distance education for rural social workers.

The need to provide carefully designed training to meet theses challenges is critical, especially in light of the limited resources for staff development within the social work agencies. The assessment process, therefore, becomes vital in planning staff training to enhance these limited resources by concentrating them on the most essential needs.

Collaboration between two major institutions in a rural midwestern state identified specific training needs for child welfare workers and a five-year plan to meet them. In 1992, the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) contracted with the Kansas State University Social Work and Special Education programs to develop a series of training modules for child welfare workers that would emphasize the training needs of workers in the rural parts of the state. The first step of the training process assessed the workers' perceptions of their needs. The second step developed a plan to meet those needs. This article briefly describes the assessment process in a public child welfare agency that included the workers themselves as a primary source of knowledge about their own needs and then addresses the plan to provide the training.

Rationale

Of the several methods available for assessing training needs, three seem pertinent to the needs of child welfare workers. Pecora, Dodson, Teather, and Whittaker (1983) describe these three as the task-based survey, the knowledge-based survey, and the worker ability/characteristic survey. Each method relies primarily on input from job analysis data and selected groups of staff members and outside experts for the development of specific training needs. These needs are then presented to workers in a written format. While efficient, these methods are often perceived as placing further demands on workers' time with dubious promise of results. Therefore, none of theses methods met our criteria that the assessment must not add to the workers' frustration and must be a positive, relevant experience.

Child welfare workers can experience a sense of worth and involvement when concepts form adult learning theory a d social work problem-solving methods are incorporated into the needs assessment process. Basic tenets of adult learning theory

support the involvement of workers in every stage of planning for training and suggest that workers be asked directly what it is they believe they need to know to perform better (Knowles, 1973). Social work problem-solving methods begin by establishing rapport and progress through identifying a problem, developing a goal and plan to reach it, implementing the plan, and evaluating the plan as well as the process (Hepworth and Larsen, 1986). Inclusiveness and mutuality are fundamental to the process. The method assumes that clients can evaluate the accuracy of their needs and wants, and can express these in the form of goals (Fox, 1987).

One research technique that encompasses many of these features involves using focus groups. In such a research technique, a facilitator meets with small groups to present the project and solicit input from the small group participants. The resulting information is used to develop effective strategies to meet the identified needs. The data gathered from this type of research can include qualitative pieces that might be not emerge or be overlooked with other types of data gathering.

Methods

Focus groups for project provided the opportunity for SRS child welfare staff members to communicate their training needs directly. Several units were involved, including protective services, foster care, adoption, family-based in-home services, and family services.

Subjects for this study involved approximately 75 supervisors and 495 social workers, representing all twelve districts within the state. To reduce the potential of promoting resistance or even hostile feelings that had in the past resulted from forced participation, the researchers used a "invitational" type of selection. Posters announced the meeting times and stressed the voluntary nature of the focus groups.

Two researchers facilitated each focus group and concentrated on leading the process in the following order: (1) Brainstorming topics of perceived training needs, (2) organizing those topics into units of study, (3) establishing individual priorities, (4) discussing preferred methods of receiving training, (5) demonstrating multimediated training, and (6) gathering participants' feedback about the focus group session.

Conclusions

Results of the focus groups indicated training priorities and training delivery issues. The data on the training priorities consisted of 34 lists of training topics from the brainstorming sessions, which had been organized into two parts: (1) 34 lists of training units orders according to their mean rating, and (2) two lists of 20 training unites ranked according to the mean rating as prioritized by area directors an social services chiefs. Table 1 summarizes the frequency with which topics were listed by the focus groups.

Data indicated strong preference for interactive training that stressed variety. The videotape and workbook format used for the agency's basic training was regarded by most participants as a helpful way to deliver information. Staff members who had used this curriculum in small-group sessions were very positive about the benefits of having an opportunity for interaction when working through the material. The participants seldom used the supplementary materials providing with the training, except in the case of outlines or concise handouts that they were able to share with clients. They preferred that materials developed of their own training be adaptable for use with clients.

TABLE 1. ***Workers' Training Needs According to Focus Groups.***

TRAINING NEED	% OF TIMES TOPICS APPEARED
Survival Skills for Workers	15%
Abuse and Neglect	11
Legal and Court System	10
Families	7
Adolescents	7
Oppositional or Resistant Clients	7
Interaction and Interviewing Skills	6
Networking and Community Resources	6
Mental Health	5
Writing Reports and Documentation	5
Cultural Differences	5
Child Development	5
Computer Training	4
Understanding SRS System	4
Special Populations and Special Education	3

n= 403 items

THE SOLUTION

Based upon these identified needs, the following units of study were identified as high priority training items:

- Child Development
- Professional Ethics
- Stress Management
- Abuse and Neglect
- Adolescents
- Family Based Treatment Strategies
- Family Issues - Separation, Attachment
- Legal Issues
- Practice Skills I
- Practice Skills II

Because the focus groups identified a desire for interactive training with a video component, the project directors chose multimediated training that included videodisc, computer, and paper based materials. The computer offers the interactivity, the videodisc offers the video examples, and the paper component offers a workbook filled with practice exercises, longer pieces of text documentation, and short, concise informational sheets that can be sent home with clients.

It quickly became clear that the content area experts needed to learn about the capabilities and limitations of videodisc technology. That has been an on-going process. At

first, there was no one on the project team who could direct the development of the videodisc component. Once someone was hired, the following abbreviated list of instructional design considerations was implemented within the design process for each of the videodiscs.

- Who are the users?
  - Background and educational level?
  - What is their computer skill level?
  - In what environment will this training be used?

- Independent Modules that can be used in any order

- Module Product Components
  - Videodisc
  - Computer Disk
  - Workbook Documentation in 3-ring binder for easy removal of pages
  - Glossary

- Record Keeping
  - Individual Computer Disk for Tracking Individual Data for SRS
  - Bookmark so Learners Can Take a Break and Come Back
    (This is particularly important for those with short timeslots)
  - Record of Progress

- Screen Design
  - Colors - use with care and purpose
  - Shapes - theme
  - Visual effect of Depth and Patterns
  - Special Effects used only where they add to instructional purpose, never for simple glitz effect
  - Layout and Font - Readability

- Movement - Logical Flow
  - Learning Objectives Must be Developed Prior to Content
  - Path must create logical choices and allow learner control
  - Transitions are Crucial
  - Prerequisites Identified Early in Design Phase

- Team Approach - Overlap Duties
  - Instructional Designer
  - Scriptwriter
  - Graphic Artist
  - Videographer, Standard Production
  - Videographer, Special Effects
  - Programmer

- Planning and Preproduction Tasks Approximately 75% of Effort
  - Module 1 Currently in Beta Test Phase
  - Modules 2-6 in various stages of preproduction
  - Different from linear video -- pay attention to in and out video/audio points, video & audio match, light levels, sound quality, media mix, animation many short segments that must fit seamlessly

- Some Features
  - Verbatim Option for Those Who Wish to See Words or Review Audio
  - Hot Words
  - Content Map
  - Workbook Reference

- Experimental Use of SVHS Video Master
  - Sufficiently good quality
  - Saves money

The delivery methodology chosen for this project is especially appropriate for rural areas because it can be used in local offices and can be utilized in in-service training and instruction for groups or individuals. The delivery format of the training modules, a self-contained computer based multimedia program, uses specific skill development methodology and takes into consideration the range of users' skill levels with computers and supporting technology. The ability of users to control the instructional process and to record their progress allows remediation when necessary or the option to move ahead when the competency is reached. Users also have the ability to learn or enhance skills they have through interaction with video images and the computer program. Program branching allows remediation of incorrect responses and provides for choices of relevant information, topics, and examples for students.

Comprehensive tests assess overall understanding and skill and students can be reinstructed in those areas in which their understanding or application is unacceptably low. After each curriculum component, a brief review determines whether the student understands the component well enough to go on to the next component. Each training module is concluded with a test on which a user must achieve a passing score in order to receive continuing education credit (CEUs).

Interactive videodisc-based instruction has the advantages of timeliness, flexible training periods, effectiveness, and multiple applications. It is capable of providing the type of staff development needed for busy rural human service workers who must fill different roles in providing services to their clients and in collaborating effectively with educational and other service professionals.

There are a number of characteristics unique to the rural setting that make training social workers in rural settings a challenging endeavor. As is true with many other professionals serving rural areas, rural social workers are usually generalists. They fill multiple roles, and the need to be informed is vital to providing comprehensive services to families.

Establishing expected competencies from field surveys and then designing video footage and computer programs to teach and evaluate are major steps towards providing essential training for social workers. The use of interactive videodisc-based instruction holds promise for delivering effective training that is individualized, updatable, and accessible.

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